

How to Reduce Rats Around Outdoor Dining

If your restaurant is offering outdoor dining, you must take steps to control rats and other pests. Restaurants are responsible for managing rats around their dining structures, including when rats have made nests (also known as burrows) into adjacent street trees. Follow these best practices to keep your dining space and any surrounding street trees rat-free.

Clean Every Day

- Quickly clean up and discard any spilled food. Rats only need an ounce of food a day to survive, so be sure to clean thoroughly. Remember that pest-related violations in the outdoor dining area count toward your inspection letter grade.
- Wash all outdoor dining areas, including the space underneath a raised platform. Also, be sure to wash the sidewalks and curbs around your restaurant every evening after closing and again before opening with soap and water or a 10% bleach solution (1 cup of bleach to 2 gallons of water). This particular bleach solution formula cannot be used for food contact surfaces.
- Power-wash underneath the structure to flush out any rats and discourage nesting beneath the structure.
- Remove any standing water.

Manage Your Garbage

- Line garbage containers with heavy-duty plastic bags. Place a rag soaked with a 10% bleach solution at the bottom and top of each bag before tying the bag tightly to reduce leakage.
- Make sure you have enough garbage containers to hold garbage between pickups and that each container has a tight-fitting lid.
- Bring garbage to the curb as close to pickup time as possible. Garbage and recycling should not be on the curb for more than two hours. Arrange specific pickup times with your carrier to reduce the time garbage is on the curb and available to rats.

Inspect Every Day

- Inspect the outdoor dining space, garbage area, planters or street trees daily to make sure they are clean and that there is no food residue or signs of rats.
- Use a flashlight to inspect the area underneath your dining shed.
- If you find signs of rat activity, such as droppings or burrows, have your pest professional thoroughly inspect and service the structure.

Work With a Licensed Pest Professional

- Restaurant operators are required to have a contract with a licensed pest professional to control pests inside the restaurant. Work with your pest professional to control rats in your outdoor dining area.
- Make sure the company you hire is licensed with the New York State Department of

Environmental Conservation. To check, call 718-482-4994 or visit dec.ny.gov.

- Work closely with the pest professional, be clear about what you want done and monitor their performance. Restaurant operators should closely inspect the outdoor dining space with the pest professional every time they visit and work with them to eliminate rats.
- If rats are burrowing or living within the dining structure, you **must pause outdoor dining service** while your pest professional eliminates the rats and treats the area. You may also need to renovate your outdoor space to discourage rats before resuming dining service.
- If you have a raised platform, have the pest professional install tamper-resistant rodent bait stations around the perimeter and monitor the area for signs of rodent activity. Using unsecured bait or tracking powder is prohibited, as it can be tracked and spread by rats, contaminating dining areas.

Keep Rats Out of Nearby Street Trees

- The rules of the Open Restaurant program (which allow qualifying restaurants and bars to expand outdoor seating on sidewalks, curb lanes, backyards, patios, plazas and open streets) prohibit dining elements from covering, shading or coming in contact with a street tree, or from being within one foot of a City tree. Having your structure next to a street tree promotes rat activity and can harm the tree. If your dining structure is already near street trees, you must take steps to prevent rats and protect the tree.
 - If burrow holes are present in street trees, have your pest professional treat the rat burrows or install tamper-resistant bait stations.
 - Hardware cloth (1/2-inch mesh; 16 gauge galvanized) can be installed as a permeable surface in tree pits to exclude rats from returning to the burrows post-treatment. Do not use chicken wire — rats can easily get through it.
 - This work requires a tree work permit from the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. To apply for a permit, visit nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/forestry-application.
 - Do not use cement, glass or other hazardous materials in the tree bed that may harm the tree or pets that can dig into the bed. Cementing a street tree is strictly prohibited.
 - Clean the areas around the tree frequently and never place garbage on or near the tree.
 - Move or change your outdoor dining set up to comply with Open Restaurant rules if your dining elements cover, shade or come in contact with a street tree, or are within one foot of a City tree.

Construct or Renovate Your Dining Structures to Prevent Pests

- Any empty space created by the dining structure can become rodent “harborage” — a place where rodents hide or nest. This includes gaps underneath your dining structure and the space inside the walls of your structure if it has an empty interior. To control pests, these areas must be easily available for inspection and cleaning. Build your structure or make these renovations so that the floor and wall voids are accessible:

- Allow drainage to pass under the floors of seating areas. Dining structures must not block rainwater drainage getting to the curb or flowing along the curb.
- Construct top-side hinged trap doors in the platform of the structure to allow for easier inspection.
- Leave walls open between the studs for a height of roughly 16 inches.
- If burrow holes are present in planters around the structure, empty the containers of all soil and rat nesting material and replace with a water-filled anchor or barrier.
- Make sure you or your staff always wear water-resistant gloves and wash hands frequently when handling soil or materials that may be contaminated with rodent urine and droppings. Provide staff with these gloves.

Resources

- For more information on pest prevention in restaurants:
 - <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/business/permits-and-licenses/rats-business-owner.page>
- For free training on rat prevention and management:
 - Rat Information Portal: [nyc.gov/rats](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/rats-control-training.page)
 - Rat Academy Training:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/rats-control-training.page>
- Learn more about Open Restaurants:
 - [nyc.gov/openrestaurants](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/rats-control-training.page)